Making a Case for the Environment and the Bottom Line

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Body

DVD packaging is getting 20 percent lighter, reducing the impact on the environment and corporate bottom lines.

Warner Home Video, by far the world's largest distributor of television and movies on DVDs, has started releasing all of its new and library titles in cases that have 20 percent less plastic, a spokeswoman said. In some instances, the cases feature a thin layer of plastic; others have cutouts in the walls.

Lightening the load on the environment was the primary motivator, says Warner, which said the effort will reduce its home entertainment division's carbon emissions by 31 percent.

But flimsier is also less expensive, and at a time when DVD sales are down sharply -- 20 to 30 percent for some categories -- every little cost saving helps. The changess save money on raw materials and shipping, although Warner would not estimate how much.

The initiative is "beneficial to the company's bottom line," said Shelley Billik, Warner's vice president for environmental initiatives. But such moves are also "important in the preservation of natural resources" and "important to our employees," she said.

Warner isn't the only studio pursuing new DVD packaging. Sony Pictures Entertainment introduced its own 20 percent reduction in DVD cases last month, and the Walt Disney Company is pursuing other green home entertainment ideas. Disney, 20th Century Fox and Sony led the industry's shift to high-definition Blu-ray discs, which come in smaller cases estimated to have a 30 percent smaller impact on the environment than standard DVDs.

Until the economic downturn, when studios started scrambling to cut costs, the gentler DVD movement was driven almost entirely by Wal-Mart, which mandates that vendors clamp down on carbon emissions and reduce packaging.

From 2006 to 2008, the carbon imprint for a DVD, including emissions from manufacturing, packaging and transportation to retail, dropped to 0.98 pounds from 1.1 pounds, according to the Digital Entertainment Group, a trade association. BROOKS BARNES

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